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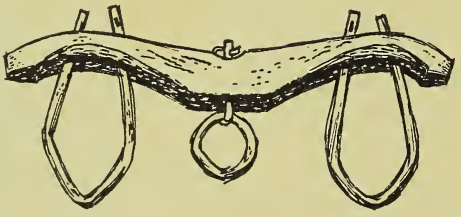

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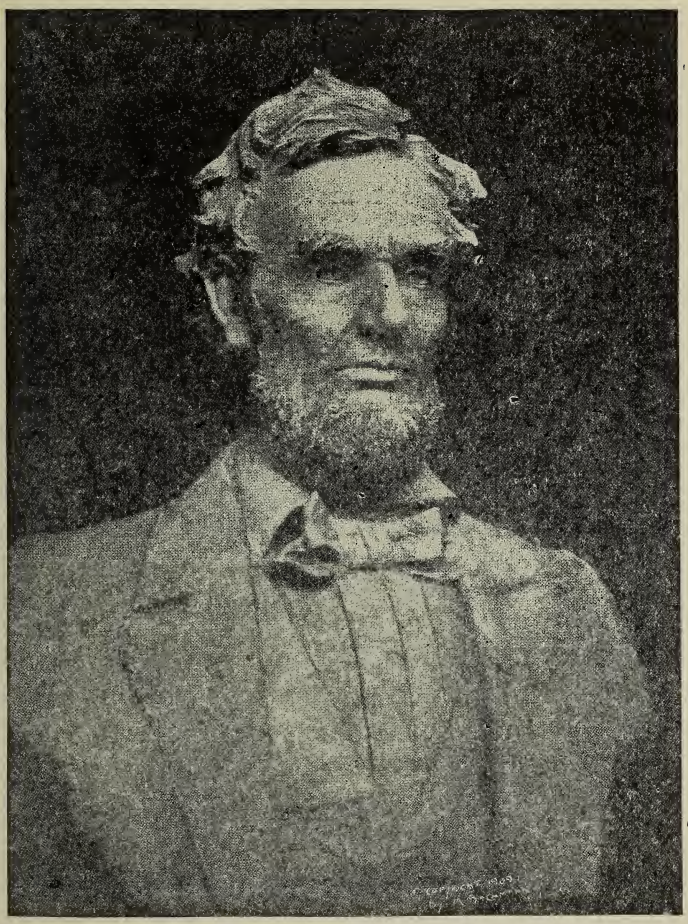
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
THE GREAT LEVELER

Delivered at the Forum of the Level Club
February 7, 1928

By
EMANUEL HERTZ



Abraham Lincoln

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN—THE GREAT LEVELER

By EMANUEL HERTZ

I TAKE it that Masonry is one of the many ripe flowers blossoming from the Book of books—the best companion of mankind in its travail through the ages. Its long line of descent traced from the very dawn of history, from the reign of the wisest of men, and called into being by one of his inspired builders, who not only erected the miracle among historical edifices—King Solomon's Temple—but also laid the foundation of this historic organization—its religious foundations, its ethical concepts, the balm of charity in which it is shrouded, could have none other than Biblical origin. Would you know how it survived, how and why it escaped destruction amidst the wreck of empires—and the overthrow of thrones—I would say, as did the biographer of the great architect in London when asked where was the monument of Sir Christopher Wren "Circumspice"—"Look about you"—and see these monuments, which have made England's imperial city beautiful and awe-inspiring. Look around you in all the deeds of charity, the ties of fellowship, the clean lives, the good citizenship we live and practice, and see how we exemplify the great principle and concept of the ages—"Love thy neighbor as thyself." For has it not been written: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." That, in short, is the philosophy of Masonry.

Where in the world could you find a character who led a life more akin to this, than the man whose one hundred and nineteenth anniversary we are celebrating this week?

Brand Whitlock, one of the few men who has attained a glimpse of the soul of Lincoln, says:

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"The story of Lincoln, perfect in its unities, appealing to the imagination like some old tragedy, has been told over and over, and will be told over and over again. The log cabin where he was born, the axe he swung in the backwoods, the long sweep to which he bent on the flat-boat in the river, the pine knot at midnight,—these are the rough symbols of the forces by which he made his own slow way. Surveyor and legislator, country lawyer riding the circuit, politician on the stump and in Congress, the unwearied rival of Douglas, finally, as the lucky choice of a new party, the President,—the story is wholly typical of these States in that earlier epoch when the like was possible to any boy. But the story does not end here. He is in the White House at last, but in an hour when realized ambitions turn to ashes, the nation is divided, a crisis confronts the land, and menaces the old cause of liberty. We see him become the wise leader of that old cause, the sad, gentle captain of a mighty war, the liberator of a whole race, and not only the saviour of a republic, but the creator of a nation; and then, in the very hour of triumph,—the tragedy for which destiny plainly marked him. Rightly told, the story is the epic of America."

Some men, indeed, are born Masons. Most of us achieve it. If ever a man lived and acted every Masonic precept, exemplified every Masonic virtue, practiced the full Masonic creed, it was Father Abraham, whose heart bled for all; who would suffer if he did not replace the feeble young bird to its nest from which it had fallen—whose hand would not sign the decree of execution in any case where the slightest reason existed or could be found for the exercise of clemency—"Judge not," said he repeatedly, "lest ye be judged" whose heart revolted at the sight of the auction block, whose life was ultimately given that his fellows be free.

Within the last two decades, the Grand Master of a nearby jurisdiction, arranged for the creating of one of our chief

executives, a Master Mason at sight. That particular chief executive was so occupied with the tasks in the service of his country, as Solicitor General, Judge, Proconsul, Cabinet officer, and President, and finally Chief Justice of the Supreme Court —that like Lincoln he had no time to enter our craft through the usual portals—unlike his youthful predecessor, who insisted and found time for coming into our Order in the manner others have gone before him. If President Taft was prevented by an active life from becoming one of our number in the usual way, how much more occupied was Abraham Lincoln. Before becoming absorbed with the work of his life, he probably was not wanted. And when he came to Washington and assumed office—and the plague had broken out—the States had begun to secede—he stood between the dead and the dying, and the plague was stayed. All who looked up to Lincoln were safe—remained in the Union, secession was stayed, the border States remained in the Union and the Union was saved; the plague of secession was stopped by the giant grip of Lincoln. He had no time to become a member at such a time—the whole country was ablaze with rebellion.

Not one of the other twenty-eight Presidents was as worn out with the labors, not only of the office, but by the unending list of tasks which an embattled country forced upon those burden-bearing shoulders. The line of petitioners, of widows, of mothers, of common people, of neighbors, of statesmen, and of soldiers never ended—day and night—during his walks, during his meals, on his way to and from the hospitals, on the lawns of the White House, he was hounded and waylaid, interviewed and importuned for a thousand and one things which taxed his powers to the limit. Besides, the Cabinet meetings, the War Office, the hospitals, were his constant abode. Some day he hoped to go to Palestine—the home where our organization was born. When could this man—the most overworked mortal who ever occupied public office—become a candidate for Masonry and go through the usual forms of Masonry?

Have you any doubt whatever that had he had the time, had the opportunity been propitious, that all the State jurisdictions in the land would not only have been happy but eager to make Abraham Lincoln a Mason at sight.

Masonry levels all of us to a sense and state of fellowship where all are kin—where all are brothers—for "how nice and pleasant it is for brothers to live in harmony"—"For are we not all children of one Father, hath not one God made us all?" In appealing to his departing Southern brethren, did he not plead: "We are not enemies, but friends, my dissatisfied countrymen." And then in the most brotherly fashion refrained from giving cause for secession and rebellion, hoping to the end that "the mystic chords of memory stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

But when his misguided brethren did fire the shot at our flag—which roused every patriot from coast to coast—he was forced into the fratricidal war and brought out of the baptism of fire and blood a recemented Union based upon equality and freedom; and when he spoke again through the Emancipation Proclamation given to the world—the greatest Masonic act in the history of the upward struggle of the race for equality and for freedom—the world heard; and no words spoken in all history have proven so potential for good, or have so calmed the waters of discontent. His work done—the departing States held in leash, he enters upon the final stage of immortality—the Heavenly gates open and in our religious fervor with which we see his passing on and up, ascending on high "purpling the air with the glory of his name," bearing to Heaven the broken shackles of four millions of slaves and laying them at the foot of the great white throne—a peace-offering for the patriot blood shed in our unnatural strife—would it be profane to suppose

that Heaven's music grew sweeter, and angels quickened their chorus, as the joyous chimes from earthly tower and dome chanted the praises of a race redeemed, and our glorified dead mingled their voices in the choir above. We almost hear the judgment of our Father in Heaven—"Well done, good and faithful servant." And then the afterglow, the black despair—and then our Masonic brethren not only here but all over the world—forty-three foreign Masonic jurisdictions are heard from—enter upon a period of mourning for their departed brother—the humble rail-splitter, the poor surveyor, the struggling lawyer, the village postmaster, the modest legislator, the gaunt captain in the Black Hawk War, the one-term Congressman, the giant debater, the Cooper Union seer and the martyr President. Every Masonic Lodge in the Union joins in the universal mourning service for the departed brother.

All masters of Masonic lodges announced in broken-hearted accents why the membership of the lodge had been assembled on that sad evening and ordered the lodge draped in mourning —at a time when the working tools of life—which worked the deliverance of four million souls—and the restoration of the Government of the people—fell from the lifeless hands of Abraham Lincoln—the man who now belongs to the ages. Oh! that some student of Masonry—some real historian of the ideas and ideals of our craft would gather in book form the tributes of the Masonic lodges and Grand lodges, to the great liberator —the great Leveller—who was the noblest and most inspired Mason of his day and generation.

Yes! we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to that great historic figure—to show the world that we ever function in days of sorrow even as in days of joy. Others have done it—the Church, the law, the statesmen—and only the other day, rather belated it is true—the Synagogue. Why not we? Was there ever subject more attractive—was there ever a piece of historic justice more urgent—in order, if for naught else—to set on edge the teeth of those who criticize and defame us.

Yes, he comforted the widow, as no other mortal did; he guarded the orphan—his last plea in his second Inaugural, the one inspired State paper of the Century, was for the widow and orphan. He who was quick to pardon and forgive, and long-suffering before entering upon a quarrel, he whose sole passion was a united country under God, who suffered more in performing his stern tasks than any other human being in our history, who was visited by trials and tribulations, who was tried by the loss of his first love and by the loss of his child, even as he was orphaned by the loss of his angel mother, and yet stood erect, unafraid on the side of God—and emerged victor, emancipator, preserver of his people and pacificator of his country—he was indeed a Mason.

Was he then a Mason without initiation? You might as well ask was he a lawyer without attending a law school? Was he a great stylist without attending a University of higher learning? Was he a military strategist of a high order—without any military experience? Was he a great executive and master of a multitude of great men, without any previous executive experience? Was he a diplomat and acquainted with the refinements of diplomatic negotiation—frustrating and holding in check not only the statesmen of the South but a Palmerston, a Gladstone and a Napoleon the Third—without ever having seen a diplomat or having had any experience in the rudiments of that game of kings and princes? Was he an orator and author of an address, the like of which we cannot find except if we go back two thousand years and listen to Pericles, without the study of the classics or the art of oratory? Was he a man of deep religious faith without belonging to a church? Do you not see that you cannot apply the yardstick to a man of his mold? He acted as a Mason would, he lived as a Mason lives, he was indeed a Mason!

The ritual which few of us ever master, and if we do for the time being, never remember, that ritual which only the few select of our craft study and remember—he lived and acted

and exemplified. The Masonic virtues, the practice of which are enjoined on us if we are to be exemplars of our craft,—Lincoln lived and acted and believed and practiced. He was the noblest type of Bible student without being a teacher or preacher of Holy Writ. But he lived in the spirit of the Bible and became one of the inspired seers and leaders of all time.

And it is for us to quote the sayings of this member of our craft—to study the lessons of his truly Masonic life, his achievements, his trials, his sufferings, and condense the narrative of the achievements of that great mind—pick out his maxims, his rules of life, and proceed to yonder altar—open our priceless and perpetual ornament and source of all life and religion, where the old ends and the new begins—in that twilight zone where the misunderstandings of the millenia have kept apart brother and brother, have made war between people and people—and acting upon the advice of Brother Ben Altheimer—write upon those blank pages which seem to separate the old and the new—the life, the achievements, the principles, the priceless maxims of that God-intoxicated soul—and thus add a connecting link of the purest gold between the old Testament and the New, and write the final chapter in that tome which Wycliffe called "a book of the people, by the people and for the people"—consisting of the life concepts of him who made sure that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Since the delivery of the foregoing, the following correspondence came into my hands, which throws a very illuminating phase on this interesting question. However, I spread it in full for whatever it is worth.

PROBATE COURT OF COOK COUNTY
Chambers of
JUDGE HENRY HORNER
CHICAGO

March
Thirteenth
1928

Mr. Emanuel Hertz,
149 Broadway,
New York City, New York

Dear Mr. Hertz:

I am enclosing you herewith a copy of the correspondence which I had with Mr. C. H. Spilman, a friend of mine of Edwardsville, Illinois, the publisher of a newspaper there, and who preceded me as Grand Orator of the Grand Masonic Lodge of Illinois. These are the copies of the originals which I have and you may retain them—you can see by Mr. Spilman's letter that they are free to use for such purposes as you desire. * * *

I trust that the enclosed will be of some service to you in your prospective opus.

Yours very truly,

HENRY HORNER.

EDWARDSVILLE INTELLIGENCE
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EDWARDSVILLE, ILLINOIS

January 21, 1927.

Hon. Henry Horner,
Judge of the Probate Court,
Chicago, Illinois.

Dear Judge:

Even the longest lane has a turning according to tradition, and I bethought me today of my promise to you several years ago and have hunted up my record of the Lincoln incident which you were desirous of receiving. It is inclosed herewith with my apologies for its long delay.

With personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

C. H. SPILMAN.

CHS-HGS

Seal Supreme Council
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Office of the
GRAND SECRETARY—GENERAL H. E.
299 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

February 9th, 1927.

Judge Henry Horner,
Probate Court,
Cook County,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Brother Horner:

Acknowledging receipt of your very pleasant letter of February 3rd, wish to say that you are at perfect liberty to use the material you mention in any way or at any time you see fit.

With personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

C. H. SPILMAN,
Gr. Secretary-General.

CHS/HWA

This story was told me by K. D. Gross, of Edwardsville, who well remembers Judge Joseph Gillespie and other friends of Lincoln. It was given to him direct by the man who figured in it—Charles Fisher, of Springfield, Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Lodge of Illinois. They were on their way to Lincoln, Ill., to a commandery meeting one time and Gross mentioned to Fisher that he had heard various stories concerning Lincoln and Masonry. "You knew Lincoln intimately and well" said Gross, "I wish you'd tell me what his views were."

Fisher said that he would and proceeded to do so. This was several years before Fisher's death and his mind was clear and entirely normal.

He said that the Grand Lodge of Illinois met at Springfield in the fall of 1860. Lincoln had been nominated for the presidency at the convention in Chicago that summer. In consequence his name was on many lips and thoughts of him were in many minds ,as the election was near at hand.

The Grand Lodge in those days was not the tremendous convention of the present but a small, compact organization, whose members knew each other as Jim or Bill, and was characterized at times by considerable informality. The first morning, after routine business had been disposed of, general topics were discussed and somebody mentioned Lincoln.

One and then another said that they had never met him but would like to very much. Presently it was decided that all would like to see the sturdy figure then so near to the national honors. It was suggested and decided that if suitable arrangements could be made the Grand Lodge would recess and they'd all go over and visit him. Charles Fisher, who I believe was not Grand Master at that time but in the line, was asked to arrange it.

Fisher went across to the capital, where the "Governor's room" so called, on the south side, had been put at the dis-

posal of Mr. Lincoln for his political conferences. His law offices were across from the capital on the west side if I remember rightly, and there he attended to business, but in this office room in the capital he met his political visitors. He said that he would be delighted to meet the gentlemen, and he and Fisher arranged for the visit to be on the following day.

Accordingly, next day at the appointed hour the Grand Lodge filed down the street to the capital and into Mr. Lincoln's office. It was a bare, barn like room, and in anticipation of the coming of the visitors there had been in from other offices round-about a lot of the hard wooden chairs such as at present grace the wash house on Monday. They retailed at fifty cents apiece at the cross roads stores until the war intervened.

Each of the visitors was introduced by Fisher. Greetings were exchanged all around and the party was seated. Mr. Lincoln wrapped his legs around each other in a manner which he had, and the conversation became general.

Presently in a lull Mr. Lincoln with recognition of the fraternal relations of his visitors made this observation: "Gentlemen, I have always entertained a profound respect for the Masonic fraternity, and I have long cherished a desire to become a member, but I have never petitioned because I have felt my own unworthiness to do so."

Of course, there was a chorus of protest, the visitors asserting that he must not let this modesty prevent the realization of the desire he professed.

Mr. Lincoln continued: "I might be overcoming my hesitancy and be petitioning at the present time, but I am a candidate for a political office, and by some such action would be misconstrued. For this reason, because my motives would be misconstrued, I must for the time being refrain."

The conversation then turned to other channels. Lincoln was elected, became engrossed in the war problems, was

assassinated, and so far as his friends in Springfield ever learned, never presented a petition to a Masonic Lodge. He maintained his home at Springfield, and so would have had to petition there. Fisher was deeply interested in all the Masonic bodies there and would have known if Lincoln had ever petitioned. Gross' brother was secretary of the second lodge, which was not organized until '59. It was known as Tyrian Lodge. Fisher was master of Springfield, No. 4. Gross asked Fisher direct if Lincoln had ever petitioned a Masonic lodge and was told positively that he never had.

I mention this because of reports which are from time to time current to the effect that Lincoln had been rejected as an applicant for Masonry, that he did not favor the order, etc. Fisher knew Lincoln well and knew the Gross family well. K. D. was the youngest son of Elder A. Gross, a notable figure of Central Illinois in the early days.

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